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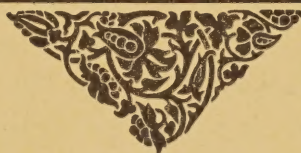
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JOHN RANGIAH

THE FIRST TELUGU
FOREIGN MISSIONARY



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LITTLE more than fifty years ago T. Rangiah was allowed by his Hindu priestly father to attend our school in Nellore, and with other children write the Telugu alphabet in the sand. He was often called out to make a tour in the honorable business of religious begging. Arrayed in the light costume of that country, with fine turban and a tray to receive offerings of rice and coins, with his rude violin he went about singing songs of the idol whose marks were fresh and abundant on his forehead. Whenever at liberty he would come to the bungalow and ask to be received again into the school. This process continued till the missionary's wife thought him able to teach the very little children, and offered him the munificent sum of one rupee (thirty-three cents) a month for that purpose. The father consented, little dreaming of the changes going on in the boy's mind. He learned

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rapidly, gave his heart to Christ, and was soon able to go about singing in His honor. Laborers were few, and we were glad to take on tours not only this boy, but such earnest believing children as Kanakiah, Ezra, Julia, Ruth and others, who proved in after years that such experiences bore an important part in their "theological education." They would call a company to the roadside by their sweet singing, and also help in talking to some of the crowd as they came and went. Thus Rangiah grew up a real evangelist.

There was in our boarding school a girl named for the great goddess Maha Lukshmee. She had been placed there by her father, who was the only Christian in a village fourteen miles away. One day he came to the mission house to say that his wife had become a Christian, and added, "She is more advanced now than I am." He wanted the daughter at home for awhile to read and explain the Bible to her mother and other villagers. The girl did a good work and returned to school. The mother walked the fourteen miles to Nellore for baptism. She had a sense of sin which is unusual there,—and here. Her burden she compared to the great one borne by a washerman's donkey.

In due time Maha Lukshmee became the wife of Rev. T. Rangiah. Their consecration was such that, unlike many of the others, they were willing

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to work for the dear Master anywhere. In Nellore, in Ramapatam and in Ongole, they wrought faithfully. In October, 1878, Mr. Jewett was asked by the Missionary Union to open a station in Madras for the purpose of evangelizing the Telugus of that great city, meanwhile pursuing his Scripture revision and translation work in their language; then Dr. Clough generously gave back Rangiah to help in pioneering again. There he is yet, while various missionaries have come and gone. He is in the station that was occupied by the noble Waterburys, while his son, Rev. T. Daniel, is helping in the other,—about four miles of heathenism between. It was there that Bennie Rangiah, a teacher, was called “up higher”; also Rachel, aged thirteen, left, asking Jesus to save a little place for her at his feet. The other children are helping at different stations in the mission; one of them, Leah, being the wife of Neran, a devoted preacher, who used to be the best boy in one of the little out-station schools.

But I want to write at this time of a younger son, John, the first foreign missionary from the Telugus and supported by them. It is now well known that in consequence of famine in India large numbers emigrated from there to South Africa. Of these several hundreds were Telugu Christians, and they sent an earnest appeal for a

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missionary. The Lord gave a distinct call to John Rangiah, who had for some years been "head master" of a large school in Nellore. He was not at ease till he had said, "Here am I, send me." But there was an obstacle; his wife, Kanakama, was not prepared for the sacrifice. Was it strange, in that caste country, where they are without the precedents and associations we have here? Are we swift to leave all and go, or swift to send? At last, however, prayer was answered; the wife became willing, even cheerfully so. Among John's qualifications for the great work in Africa was his ability to speak in the other languages of those who had emigrated there from India.

Of the "setting apart" Mrs. McLaurin wrote: "John's spirit and farewell words were all that could be desired. His last request was that we should pray that he might not be proud—this in view of his being the first missionary from among his people, and because in consequence there were so many kind things being said about him. It was very touching to listen to dear old Rangiah's prayer at the ordination of his son. It was so full of tender yearning, and yet strong and cheerful faith. He offered it with streaming eyes."

Some further details gathered from letters which have been received will be of interest in showing

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how the way has opened up before our brother, who went to a country and people so new and strange. Of his arrival (June 12, 1903) and reception in Africa he wrote to his "missionary father," Dr. Downie:—

After fully one month's voyage we arrived safely, by the grace of our Lord, in Durban. I feared very much whether my letters reached Spencer Walton, Esq., or not, and also even when they are reached perhaps he will receive me just as they receive the coolies from India, for I had a very discouraging report in India about Natal. But to my surprise he received me just in the name of the Lord, with his full love and tender care. Ever since he is our missionary father and Mrs. Walton our missionary mother. They are to us just what you and Mother Downie are to your Telugus there.

Kanakama dreadfully suffered during the voyage in all respects. But Lord has wonderfully made to fade away all her trouble by the fatherly love and care of these missionaries here. To give the account of my voyage is very long and useless. But with one word I think you can understand: the dogs and pigs in their cabins are better than the passengers on the deck; yet Lord was very gracious to us there, too, all during the voyage, either in rains, in storm, and when Kanakama had seasickness and homesickness almost all the days of the voyage. Lord has wonderfully heard my prayers; all this is nothing but the grace of our Lord. Praise be ever to him. On the very night of the day of my landing there was a meeting in the mission house, and the missionary asked me to say a few words. I said I never had experience of speaking in English in meetings. But he encouraged me, and said, "Never mind about your broken language, we all are your Christian brethren; better say few words." After my speech he asked me to

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go and bring Kanakama; by the time I returned he spoke to the people very favorably about me, and raised some money for my furniture. This is wonderful gift. I never expected, never asked. I had very little money in my hand, and everything is three times the price in India.

The people have received him warmly, and have listened to his message with marked attention. He writes that of the sixty Baptist Christians that came from the Vinukonda, Markapur, Podili, Darsi, Ongole, and Madras churches almost all kept themselves in good Christian conduct in spite of the absence of a minister for the last three years. An incident connected with his first convert has brought the work into special prominence. Dr. McLaurin has written the following account :—

John heard of a Telugu who was in jail, condemned to die for murdering a comrade. He went to see him, and preached to him Jesus. He had never heard before, but after a few days received the message with his whole heart. Several people interested themselves in getting a reprieve for him, but without success. Quite an interest in the case was created in the community. A Methodist minister suggested that he should baptize the man. John mildly objected that the condemned man had received the gospel at his hands, and had asked to be baptized by him; and besides, he, John Rangiah, did not believe in sprinkling, but immersion. The other replied that he might be sprinkled, as there were no facilities for baptism in the jail. John reminded him that there was an Oriental bath place in the jail. So they got permission from the governor to use the bath, and there in the presence of the prison officials

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and prisoners John immersed him into the blessed Trinity. A few days afterward, when the day of execution came, the man requested John to come up on the platform and stand by him while he was launched into eternity. His last words were, "I am going to the good Jesus Christ; I am going to the refuge at the feet of Christ, Jesus, Jesus."

We thank God for John Rangiah, for his zeal, his courage, his faithfulness to principle in a trying situation.

Since these first successful efforts in Natal not only has Dr. Downie written most encouragingly, but also Dr. McLaurin, writing from Ramapatam, says the news "has given a mighty impetus to the revival spirit in the seminary at Ramapatam, and we shall extend it, if possible, into every church."

At the very beginning God has thus set his seal upon the Telugu Baptist Missionary Society, and we believe that those who, out of their poverty (many of them earn only four to eight cents a day), are giving to the support of this work will receive an inestimable reward.

